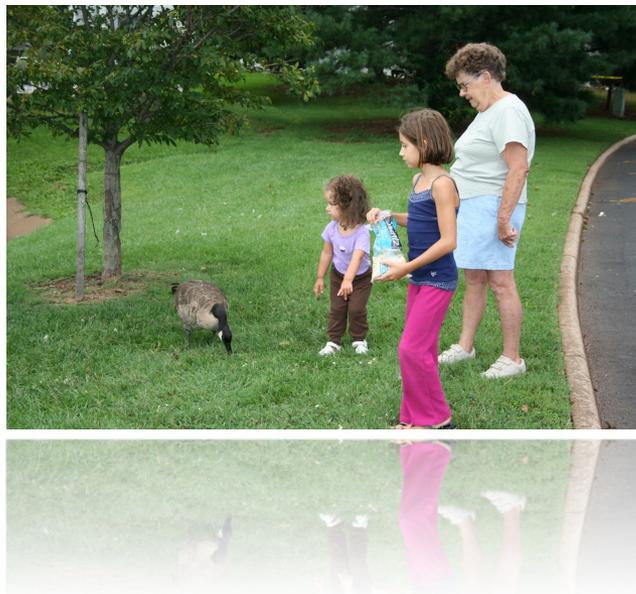




# The Role of “Heart” in Heart Disease

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**This and previous presentations are archived at**  
<https://sma.nasa.gov/safety-messages>

# What changes your thinking and behavior?

*"I saw many people who had advanced heart disease and I was frustrated because I knew if they just knew how to do the right thing, simple lifestyle and diet steps, that the entire trajectory of their life and health would have been different."*

- Dr. Mehmet Oz

- What can this statement teach us about health and safety?
- Reading that heart disease is the number one killer is not going to change the way you feel, think, and behave. Personal events that "touch your heart" do really change you.
- Heart disease has touched my heart deeply.

# On the path to heart disease

- I first became aware I was on the path to heart disease at age 30.
- To apply for life insurance, I had to do blood work. The doctor told me she was concerned about my high cholesterol.
- Like many young men, my initial thought was, “This really is no big deal, nothing will happen to me.”
- My thoughts changed a few weeks later after my dad had a minor stroke.



**1996: Forty pounds of college and married life**

# My parents' healthy heart habits (or lack of)

- Flash back 10 years to 1986.
- My parents look pretty healthy. But looking deeper reveals a true picture of their health.
  - My dad was a diabetic with high blood pressure who did not change his lifestyle.
  - My mom's cholesterol was probably in the high 200s. She did not know her cholesterol level, but she did know her father had 5 heart attacks by 1986.
- How did their lifestyle contribute to their risk of heart disease?
  - Neither were obese, nor were they heavy drinkers.
  - They did have unhealthy habits—especially when you consider their known health issues and genetic history:
    - They used tobacco.
    - Dinner was usually a high-fat meal of meat and potatoes.
    - They did not participate in the right kind of physical activity.



**1986: Jim and Jan Watson**

# Seventeen years of heart disease

- From 1996 to 2014, my parents experienced several heart disease related events.
  - Dad had a minor stroke in 1996.
  - Mom had a minor heart attack in 1998.
  - Mom had a major heart attack in 1999.
  - Dad died of a major stroke in 2000.
  - Mom was disabled, physically and mentally, by a major stroke in 2011.
  - Mom died of complications caused by her medical condition in 2014.
- These events changed the way I thought, felt, and behaved about my own heart disease risk.
  - I exercise—some years a lot, some years not too much—but I never stop trying.
  - I keep my fat and calorie intake low—sometimes I’m good, sometimes I’m not—but I never stop trying.
  - And I’ve almost got my cholesterol where my doctor wants it.



**My mom about 8 hours before  
a major stroke**

# Preventing heart disease

## What can you do to prevent heart disease?

- **Visit a doctor** to learn your cholesterol levels, blood pressure, and blood sugar.
- **Don't smoke** because it contributes to the number one and two causes of death: heart disease and cancer.
- **Eat healthy** to control weight, cholesterol, and blood pressure.
- **Exercise** to control weight and increase good cholesterol.
- **Learn your hereditary risk** because it will help you understand your risk better.

**Take the American Heart Association's My Life Check to determine your heart health score and help you develop a list of what you can do to improve your score. It can be found at the link below.**

<http://mylifecheck.heart.org>

# Health and Safety Leadership Lessons

- To change the way leadership and employees think, feel, and behave about health and safety, you need to make it personal and not about the numbers.
- On a personal leadership level, I've learned that sharing my stories is a great way to connect to the wider workforce.
  - I first did a version of this presentation to my employees and Langley Senior Leadership the month of my mom's death.
  - I shared a written version of the story with the entire Langley workforce.
  - For weeks, employees, many whom I did not know, sent me emails and stopped me in the hallway to tell me their stories.